

## Cold Water Guppies

© Gregory Dickman

In April of 2004, I read an article in the April 2004 e-Bulletin of GuppyLabs entitled "The Full Blue of Rio de la Plata - Part One" by Rosario Arijon."

In this piece, the author described how a certain Professor Daniel Tejedor, a man of impressive credentials, maintained a fish farm in Olidin, Uruguay where many varieties of ornamental fish were raised. Of specific note was the fact that the gentleman raised, among these various species, guppies that were perfectly adapted to breed at 18 degrees Celsius, and live at 14 degrees Celsius. That is 57.2 to 64.4 degrees Fahrenheit! "No way," I thought. At the time, I was barely keeping my fragile IFGA strains alive at a constant 78 degrees Fahrenheit, and drops of fry were out of the question! Further, I would later find out I was dealing with some of the *tougher* strains. Was there a misprint in the GuppyLab's article? It was just so inconceivable to me.

Over the years that followed, I would occasionally search the web for any other corroborative information on "cold water guppies". I found some who swore they had some in ponds or in Coldwater tanks with goldfish, but other forum members would always dismiss the claims as lies, or insist such guppies were, in fact, *Gambusia* (mosquito fish). One rather famous American guppy breeder claimed that he knew for a fact guppies would not reproduce below 70 degrees Fahrenheit, and as a long-time New England resident, he should know.

My interest in the subject was born out of a bit of necessity. As the owner and inhabitant of a 115-year-old Victorian cottage, things can get a bit, shall we say, "drafty" in winter. The fact is that the house does not get above 68 degrees from November until the first of April. Due to high utility bills, even those with modern homes typically set the thermostat to 70 degrees during the winter. In my case, with winter temperatures between 10 and 35 degrees Fahrenheit, my home never sees anything warmer than 68 degrees even with the furnace running non-stop. It is usually around 64 degrees through most of the winter.

Since I do not have a room I can designate to my tanks, my tanks are spread about the house and are part of the decorum, if you will. I have 14 tanks at the moment. I have 5 gallon and 10 gallon. The 10 gallons I divide in half with a piece of fitted glass siliconed in place. Obviously, I do not have the luxury of being able to heat a single fish room, as my tanks are strewn about the entire house. Electric heaters I have always used in the past, but always found them highly inaccurate. Perhaps the really high-dollar ones are better. No, I found that clamp lights held 12 inches from the water's surface and fitted with 100 watt Sylvania "chick brooder" bulbs provided a nice, safe, even heat during the winter, keeping the tanks at about 80 degrees Fahrenheit if the ambient room temperature was around 68 degrees. The problem, however, should be obvious. Essentially, it is like sleeping with the lights on.

The Great Recession of 2008/2009 found me returning to school for nursing, while pinching pennies to cope with ever-rising energy costs. If I was to have this many tanks of

guppies, they would have to be able to survive at room temperature, whatever that "room temperature" was. Either that, or perhaps my living arrangements were better suited to goldfish. Cold water guppies were no longer some esoteric consideration, but a hard cold reality, no pun intended.

I have a line of German Red lace Snake Skins imported from Germany by Luke Roebuck and Edgar Chiasson, a line of Blue and HB Blue Deltas out of Bob Lewis stock, a line of Yellow Lace Snake Skins from Anthony Fischinger, and a line of Green Lace Snake Skins out of Joe Rosenberry. Anthony Fischinger had "proofed" the Yellow Lace Snake Skin line-that is, subjected them to extreme water temperatures and conditions-before I even received them. The German Red Lace Snake Skins and Blue/HB Blue Deltas had been greatly toughened over the last half decade in my care, as like Anthony Fischinger, I unequivocally reject the sterile, constant conditions of guppy husbandry set forth by most of the guppy fraternity-I feel such conditions have resulted in the weakened immune systems we currently see and wrongly attribute to inbreeding. But that is another article, and a bit of a "hot potato" at that. My Green Lace Snake Skins were new arrivals, however, having been received in March of 2009. I awaited, with high levels of anxiety, fry from these Green Lace, but was rewarded with tiny drops of up to 5 fry now and again very sporadically. Things were not looking too good going into the winter of 2009/2010.



Clearly seen my patented algae-encrusted Chore Boy Pot Scrubbers (unequalled by any plant in water purification)

I relate a bit of background information about my fish because some, reading what follows, will no doubt say, "Well, he is a bit of a nutter anyway, and his fish can live happily in a sewer." I will deny none of that, but what is important to note is that going into the winter of 2009/2010, I had not had the Green Lace Snake Skins long enough to improve or destroy. Therefore, the experience which I am about to relate can well pertain to those of you who have, what I would call, "puny" fish. This is meant as no slight, for here in America, many major pet shop chains have quit stocking guppies because they often fail to thrive under even the best conditions. So perhaps a disclaimer is in order. Changes to a guppy husbandry regimen should be gradual. Since my fish and I all inhabit the same house, and since I like to do an outcross now and again, I had, for example, stopped disinfecting nets and hoses when going from tank to tank for quite some time. Initially, an outbreak of disease would result, but soon those that survived the outbreak imbued future generations with a vigour superior to that with which I had started.

I have not had an outbreak of any disease since 2007, and I perform water changes very rarely-perhaps twice a year under normal circumstances--- and virtually all my tanks have an appreciable substrate of mulm. Algae is part and parcel of nearly every tank, and plants of some variety or another inhabit most. I am also a great believer in the merits of the Ramshorn Snail. I also attribute most of my success to feeding a good *commercial* flake food such as TetraMin Betta Flake, as the formulation of these products will not foul water as will some of the "specialty" flakes from the so-called "specialty" dealers. Modernity does have its benefits. No, I leave the homemade beef heart and earthworm flake concoctions to those with either more time on their hands than myself, or an automated water-changing system. Like the aquarists who wrote at the turn of the last century, I belong to the Cult of the Old Water, and have the highest regard for a strong nitrogen cycle and ancient, seasoned filter media.

Some will say, "But what about the hormones released by adult fish that impairs the growth of the young?" To which I will respond, "What about 'em. Were there any validity in that, I would have some pretty small fish rather than some of the monsters I have."

I was once a slave to the water change grind, the bubbling brine shrimp hatcheries everywhere, the boxes of white worm and Grindal worm cultures-on and on ad nauseum. For the hard-to-spawn species, or those who have not been domesticated long, such measures are, I am sure, necessary. Not so with the guppy. He will grow to his fullest genetic potential so long as his base level needs are met. Much like you or I, once our dietary protein needs have been met, it matters not whether it was with caviar or tuna. The often-spouted dangers of feeding white worms too frequently I found to have no basis at all. Far from "fattening up" my females, they had no effect whatsoever! I once even tried water-soluble vitamin B12 in my Brine Shrimp hatches to fight split tails. Once, I even believed that resting on a dirty tank bottom caused fin rot.

There is a myth for every day of the year, but the truth is great breeders raise great fish through selective breeding and a keen eye. They separate the sexes early, watch each female's drops, and have the luxury of time and talent to do so. Often, you will find they hedge their bets with the production of vast numbers. With a hundred or more tanks, it is quite easy to do.

My point in all this digression is that those who say a thing cannot be done, nine chances in ten, have never tried-much like the chap who said guppies cease production below 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Clearly, he had never tried.

There is not much to say, really. Late November of 2009 saw me going into winter as usual, but this time there would be no electric heaters or heat lamps. In house temperatures gradually and slowly dropped from the 90's of summer, through the 70's of autumn, before settling in between the 58 through 66 degrees of December through March. But an interesting thing occurred. The fish continued to eat, live, and mate. Activity levels remained normal. The cherry on the cake was that my Green Lace Snake Skins, who heretofore I had thought to be suffering inbreeding depression, actually began to give me large drops of fry! Tank thermometers registered 58- 64 degrees through most of the winter, and not a solitary case of clamping, shimmying, or disease occurred-not one. Juvenile growth was

slowed a bit, and gestation stretched to 45 days; but, the adults aged so much more gracefully, and I was actually even able to set up some backcross tanks. Longer life spans do have their rewards.

It is now Easter Sunday 2010 as I write this, and with spring comes new challenges such as the dreaded green water algae blooms, which I am already having to fight. Those chilly days in the low 60's that I sat here with a sweater on, looking in amazement at my guppies, are hills that I am sure will look greener far from now, when the guppies and I are in the midst of summer's swelter.

Contact the author email: [gcdickman@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gcdickman@sbcglobal.net)